

February 2, 2020

VALUED

DEUTERONOMY 5:17; 19:4-13

INTRODUCTION

We live in an increasingly violent world. Major cities in America are littered with bodies, young and old, black and white, rich and poor etc., who have been murdered. School shootings have shed light, not simply on the need for better gun laws and background checks but, they have also shown that the evil of murder extends even to the youngest of hearts. In a sense, none of us should be surprised by these things and yet, the sheer number of events that have taken place makes anyone wonder whether or not the people of God are actually bringing to bear the vision of God's kingdom on earth. Murder must be decried, not simply by marches, but by the legal protection of the innocent and the swift justice handed out to those who commit homicide or manslaughter with intentional evil.

PROHIBITION (Deuteronomy 5:17)

The wide range of understandings regarding the aspect of murder has caused debates and divisions in almost every sector of culture, including the church. When the Lord, however, commands us not to murder He has one specific aspect in mind: murdering someone for reasons other than being enemies of war or for committing a crime that warrants capital punishment. In other words, what the Bible is set against is the deliberate and intentional killing of someone outside of the legal (biblical) sanctions within the Word of God. In a word, we are not to commit homicide. This understanding is not so controversial as that of euthanasia and abortion. Some feel the freedom to decide, on their own, whether or not they, or someone else has the right to take their life. Assisted suicides have created a moral foray in which sympathizers come from all stripes, some of whom are Christian. Abortion is by far the greater "controversy" creating division both political and spiritual with many believing the right to choose is actually *life giving*. However, when one considers the biblical and even the scientific evidence, it is clear that fetus' not only have heartbeats but are known by the Lord in the womb (Psalm 139:13; Jeremiah 1:5) and have a purpose determined by the Lord (Galatians 1:15). The social and emotional aspects related to these issues are very real, but we must give way to the Bible at all times which calls anything other than killing for war or heinous crimes (homicide OR manslaughter) – murder. Euthanasia is wrong and abortion is wrong. We should not commit murder.

GRACE (DEUTERONOMY 19:4-10)

There was a difference in the law between accidental and premeditated homicide. Accidental murder was shown in the example of a man's axe, while being used to cut down a tree, accidentally flew off and killed another person. In this situation the *offender* could flee to a sanctuary city and not be condemned (Deuteronomy 19:5). In light of the possibility of such incidents the people were to add additional sanctuary cities throughout the land to mitigate against the possibility of unjust killings due to accidental deaths (Deuteronomy 19:7-10). This law was put in place because it is within the heart of the injured person to return evil for evil seeking to avenge the murder of a relative, as in the example of the axe already given. Therefore, the law was given to protect the offender from harm since he held no previous animosity towards the one accidentally murdered (Deuteronomy 19:6). Underneath the essence of this law is the grace of God extended to the people in which they are to extend to others in such circumstances. While we may have never murdered anyone – accidentally or intentionally – Jesus declared that murder is different within the economy of the Kingdom of God. Murder, physically speaking, meant the taking of a life, but Jesus says that murder happens in *being angry with, insulting or*

calling another believer a fool. Such action is liable of judgment and hell (Matthew 5:21-22). The actions Jesus mentions are intentional sins – intentional acts of *spiritual* murder – and the Lord, in them all, provides grace for our repentance, restoration and reconciliation with one another. If the Lord had not provided the law of sanctuary cities the people of Israel, in some circumstances, would have continually violated God's law. But the Law preserved the brother or sister who, in their anger, was seek vengeance. They were protected from their own sin (grace) because the Lord provided these sanctuary cities.

JUSTICE (Deuteronomy 11:13)

Even though the Lord provided us with so many means of grace and mercies it is still possible that we, in our sinful passions, might seek the handle matters in our way. If this were to happen, if a person still sought and murdered someone for an accidental homicide and, afterwards, fled to the sanctuary cities for protection, the elders were still charged to be diligent in executing justice (Deuteronomy 19:13). If the person is found to have avenged another's murder he would be punished and executed (Deuteronomy 19:14). One evident reality in this is that the Lord sees. It matters not whether the individual hides in a sanctuary city or not, the Lord who sees all and knows all will discover and expose such a person. The same is true for all of us. In our sinful passions we can act and behave in ways that warrant discipline from the Lord. Whatever the excuse or reasoning may be the Lord will shed light on our heart motives and deceptions and call us to account.